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CHAPTER 9

WHAT DO EARLY EUROPEAN CONTACT-PERIOD VILLAGES IN TORRES STRAIT LOOK LIKE?: ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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When European sailors first visited Torres Strait from 1606 into the 1800s, Indigenous villages were observed and described in letters, diaries, books and images. Since then, the shape and structure of individual buildings and villages on the islands have changed. This paper asks what these early European contact villages looked like, and how they varied across the Strait. Early historical and ethnographic references to villages are here reviewed in order to make archaeological observations that will enable archaeologists to historicise village life in Torres Strait. □ *Villages, Torres Strait, ethnohistory, archaeological sites.*

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The islands and waters of Torres Strait have long been a conduit for material goods and ideas between the two large, continental islands of New Guinea in the north and Australia in the south. Yet Torres Strait Islanders are themselves culturally unlike Aboriginal peoples or Papuans or island Melanesians; they have developed their own, distinctive ways of life. This is, and was at the time of early European contact, evident in religious practice, political structure, kinship, totemic affiliation, diet and trade relations. In such a context of cultural distinctiveness, the archaeological history of Torres Strait Islanders has rarely enquired into those aspects of daily life closest to home: that space of everyday social activity, the village. Until now archaeological research across the Strait has largely focused on the timing of colonisation (e.g. Barham, 2000; Carter, 2001; David et al., 2004a; McNiven et al., 2006; Rowland, 1985), horticulture (Barham, 1999; Harris, 1977), environmental dynamics (e.g. Barham, 1999; McNiven & Hitchcock, 2004; Rowe, 2006), trade (e.g. Barham, 2000; Carter et al., 2004; McNiven, 1998), diet and foraging practices (Bird & Bliege Bird, 2000; Ghaleb, 1990), lithic technology (e.g. McNiven & von Gnielinski, 2004), rock-art (e.g. Brady et al., 2004; McNiven et al., 2004a), the junction of oral tradition and archaeology (David et al., 2004d), and on tracking back in time specific ethnographically documented practices (e.g. Barham, 2000), in particular ritual and spiritual sites and paraphernalia – stone arrangements (e.g.

David et al., 2004b), dugong bone ceremonial arrangements (McNiven & Feldman, 2003), *bu* (*Syrinx aruanus*) shell arrangements (David et al., 2005), and turtle shell masks (David et al., 2004c). Many of these research programmes have targeted specialised sites such as ritual places or gardens. And, to be sure, some have involved village sites, such as Barbara Ghaleb's 1980s work at Goemu (Gumu) on Mabuyag (Ghaleb, 1990, 1998), which remains largely unpublished; David Harris's test excavation at Dabungai on Mabuyag, and his larger excavation at Sigau on Mua (Barham and Harris, 1987), both of which also remain unpublished; Mike Rowland's limited excavations on Nagi and Mua in 1981 (Rowland, 1985); and David Moore's excavations at Port Lihou on Muralag, which also remains unpublished (Moore, 1978). Yet few details have yet been published about the archaeology of any village site in Torres Strait, those places where people dwelt and carried-out their everyday lives (for an exception, see David & Weisler, 2006).

Historical texts and oral accounts indicate that twenty islands contained what were explicitly described as 'villages' at the time of initial sustained European contact towards the end of the 1800s or shortly beforehand (McNiven et al., 2004b: 88). These islands have long been divided into four major groups by outsiders and Islanders themselves (see Fig. 1 in Manas et al., 'Introduction to Gelam's Homeland' chapter 1, this volume). The Top Western Islands are the low,

flat and mangrove-rich northwestern islands of Boigu and Saibai, and the high, rocky island of Dauan (the only source of rock within 45km of the New Guinea coastline). To the south are the Western Islands, rocky granite islands, including Mabuyag, Badu, Mua and Nagi. Further south again are the southwestern islands of Muralag and the islands to the immediate north of the Australian mainland; these are usually considered part of the Western Islands. To the east are the Central Islands, consisting of mostly small, low coral atolls such as Tudu and Aureed. Further to the east are the high volcanic Eastern Islands of Mer, Dauar, Waier, Erub and Ugar. Each group is recognised for the somewhat distinctive way of life of its occupants, with the Eastern Islanders' language (Meriam Mir) being significantly different to those of the Central, Top Western and Western Islanders (Kala Lagaw Ya, Kawaw Lagaw Ya and their variants; see David et al., 2004a and Shnukal, 1998 for details).

VILLAGE LIFE IN TORRES STRAIT

Before embarking on an archaeology of village life in Torres Strait, we must position ourselves such that we can recognise villages from the archaeological record. We therefore begin by asking three questions, 'what is a village', 'what does a village look like in the Strait?', and 'how would we recognise one archaeologically?'. We review the historical and ethnographic literature in an attempt to characterise salient features of villages both before and after the period of contact with Europeans and Pacific Islanders. However, villages changed through the course of history, and therefore we undertake this review as a starting point only, one that will enable us to identify general archaeological principles by which villages and their features may be recognised archaeologically, and through which we may begin to archaeologically track back in time the history of specific, ethnographically documented practices associated with village life.

Ian McNiven, Judith Fitzpatrick and John Cordell (McNiven et al., 2004b) have recently undertaken an extensive literature survey of site types across Torres Strait. They identified 621 sites from that literature review, divided into 21 different site types, villages being one of these. Other archaeological site types identified by McNiven et al. (2004b) include shell middens, stone artefact scatters, rockshelters, earth ovens, wells, canals, clam shell water containers, horticultural/grove/tree sites, fishtraps, stone tool

quarries and sources, ochre quarries, grinding grooves, stone carvings, carved/scarred trees, rock-art sites, stone/bone/shell/earth arrangements, other stone structures, burial/skull sites, *kod* and *zogo* ritual sites. Some of these sites are found in close association with villages.

While 'village' sites may be readily identifiable from ethnographic and historical documents, they are not so easily characterised archaeologically, for a number of other site types possess structural features that could easily be mistaken for evidence of villages (e.g. large shell middens). Furthermore, there is also the tricky question of when does an occupied place become a village? For example, some of the islands of Torres Strait contain ritual sites that were repeatedly used over many hundreds of years, such as the *kod* site at Pulu where male initiation, the processing of human heads following raids, and the teaching of youths took place (McNiven et al., 2002), and *zogo* sites which relate to sacred places where oracles were consulted, and magic undertaken (e.g. to control the wind, the productivity of gardens, the spread and number of vermin) (cf. David and McNiven, 2005; Haddon, 1901-1935). Such sites are known to have contained permanent structures to house sacred objects and in which to isolate or educate youths, but they were never located in places where the broader community generally resided. Rather, all such specialised, sacred and ritual sites that we have come across are located at some distance from residential locations, in liminal locations such as hilltops, dense forest groves or small, unoccupied islands well away from the gaze of everyday life. Furthermore, on some islands where freshwater is scarce permanent villages may have been abandoned when freshwater ran out, only to be re-occupied when conditions improved.

We thus begin by defining villages as semi-permanent to permanent places of residence containing groups of houses. Permanency in this instance does not relate to the presence of people, but rather to the residential structures themselves, although in practice most villages will be occupied for much of the time by people. We define villages through the long-term presence of physical dwellings rather than the semi-permanent or permanent presence of people because, in some cases, villages may be set-up for example as seasonal residential bases, or as locations with established facilities that people may go to during particular times of the year only, such as times of feasting, or to get away from the hustle and bustle of the more densely and more permanently

occupied main village base. Other possibilities for the existence of village sites without people include temporary abandonments for reasons of security during times of warfare, or, as noted above, during times of scarcity of natural resources such as water. The possibilities for temporary abandonment or lack of occupation are numerous. At key here is the core notion of 'village' as a residential place where people congregate in semi-permanent to permanent structures modified anthropogenically. This general definition can then contain a qualifying appendage to communicate the type, or characteristics, of the village one wishes to discuss: a permanent village; a dry-season temporary village; a special-purpose gardening village and so on.

In developing an archaeological definition of villages for Torres Strait, it is important to consider what these places mean and how they can enable us to better investigate the archaeology of the Strait. We begin with the assumption that villages are social spaces fundamentally embedded in the way that people see and organise themselves in the world. While villages exhibit characteristics of what might be termed the 'domestic' (residential structures, middens etc), they are also meaningful places connected to how people structure and understand their *social* spaces. An archaeology of villages is thus a doorway into spatial history: how people organise their lives in social space.

An example of this kind of meaningful social space for the ethnographic period of the late 1800s into the 1900s can be seen in the Mualgal culture story, Aukum and Tiai. The story tells of Aukum, Puapun and Wawa who lived around Totalai, a village on the extreme northern point of Mua (see Ash et al., chapter 11, this volume). Wawa became jealous that his niece gave fish to Puapun (Aukum's brother) and killed Aukum's son, Tiai. The grieving Aukum killed her uncle in retribution and went on a long journey to find the spirit of Tiai. After travelling to all the islands north of Mua, Aukum found Tiai at Kibu, the land of spirits beyond the horizon of the island of Boigu to the north of Mua (immediately to the south of the southwestern end of Papua New Guinea). In their meaningful spatial enchainment as a storyscape, together the village of Totalai, Aukum, Tiai, and the islands and sea traversed along the journey to the spirit land Kibu, unify the apparently distinctive concepts of people and place in a process of dwelling that connects people as always in-place. Like other social spaces, villages here are features in the physical

landscape that connect people to other places through the ontological world that continually frames and reinforces notions of self, identity and community.

The notion of the village as a centrifugal social space is useful for considering how people organised themselves in place, and thus for looking at the spatial connections and histories of different types of sites that may also be archaeologically visible. Physically, villages are distinctive from other sites in that they contain residential and sometimes communal structures, and it is from this simple starting point that we begin to form a working concept of the village. The village is a communal locus for cultural interaction and social exchange which may be investigated by looking at such things as the configuration of residential structures, the use of 'private' and 'public' spaces, building techniques and house forms. Understanding which social practices occurred in the village (and which were taken elsewhere) provides a contextual basis for understanding the organisation of social spaces and an archaeology of linked places.

Seventy-one old villages have been identified from the Torres Strait historical and ethnographic literature by McNiven et al. (2004b: 77). These are located on the islands of Boigu, Dauan, Saibai (Top Western Islands), Mabuyag, Badu, Mua, Nagi, Muralag (Western Islands), Gebar, lama, Waraber, Tudu, Damuth, Masig (Central Islands); and Ugar, Tapoga, Erub, Mer and Dauer (Eastern Islands) (Fitzpatrick et al., 1998: 52). There is, in addition, the village reported by de Prado (1930) and tentatively located from historical sources on the island of Zegey by Hilder (1980) (see below).

When the first European sailors ventured through the Straits from the east in September 1606, their first recorded observations made note of the presence of occupied villages on the islands of los Perros and Caribes (which Hilder (1980) has identified as the islands of Zegey and Iama, respectively), although the surviving expedition journals and letters do not document any specific details about those villages (de Prado, 1930: 159-165). Later, as European sea traffic increased during the 1800s, mariners continued to report the presence of villages across the Strait, sometimes contrary to their own expectations, having come from mainland Australia where such forms of long-term residential locations were widely thought to have been unknown to local indigenous peoples.

During his second voyage across Torres Strait, Captain William Bligh (Lee, 1920: 120, 181-183, 259) observed villages on the islands of Gebar and Damuth in 1792. On Damuth, he reported 'a small village consisting of a dozen or fifteen huts with flat roofs. Each had a doorway but no door, and several of the huts were joined together and formed one front. They were slightly built and covered with mattings or palm thatch' (Lee, 1920: 181). One of the first reports of Torres Strait villages after Bligh's was then made by Captain Jules Dumont D'Urville, who on 9th June 1840 landed on Tudu in the Central Islands (Rosenman, 1987: 549):

Tudu Island is scarcely a mile in length [...] On its southern end continually battered by the sea, there is a small dune where about a dozen huts can be seen. It is on this point, the one that is most exposed to the sun and wind, that the natives have set up camp. On this sandy island there is not a trickle of drinkable water, or coco-nuts, indeed no vegetable product suitable for use as food. To procure fresh water the natives carefully collect rain water, which is certainly abundant in these regions. To do this they place giant clam shells under the *pandanus* trees, the leaves of which are broad and hang down towards the ground to catch the water. Some of these shells are very big. When we were there all these reservoirs were almost full, and if, in these areas the rains are always as plentiful as at the time we were there, there is no doubt that they amply provide for the needs of the population. [...]

When our officers went to the village they found all the huts deserted; they had purposely removed their women and children to protect them from being pursued by Europeans.

The next historical writings to make mention of villages after Dumont D'Urville are by J. Beete Jukes (1847, I: 155), who wrote of the villages on Nagi and Iama in 1845:

Captain Blackwood landed upon Mount Ernest (Nagi) (807 feet high), and found a group of huts much superior to any we ever saw in Australia, a small grove of cocoa-nuts, and another of large bamboos[...] In the huts were found parcels of human bones, ornamented with red ochre, a mask or hideous face made of wood and ornamented with the feathers of some struthious bird, and one or two bundles of small wooden tubes, eight inches long and half an inch in diameter, the use of which we never could discover. [...]

On Turtle-backed Island (Iama) we found a few small groves of cocoa-nut trees near a group of huts, with a little thicket of bamboo; and near the centre of the island, following a little path through a matted wood, rendered impervious by creepers, we came one day on the first symptoms of cultivation of the ground we had ever seen among the aborigines of this part of the world; but it had evidently been dug, though in a rude manner, and in it were set several young plantain-trees, one or two other plants, and two trailing plants, somewhat like French beans in appearance, which we afterwards found were a kind of yam. The huts on this island had the appearance of a first attempt at a house, having side walls about two feet high, and a gable-shaped roof rising four feet from the ground. They were about ten feet long and six feet wide, made principally of bamboo, and thatched with grass and leaves. They stood in a picturesque little spot, backed by some huge blocks of sienite, on which some large shells were arranged. About fifty yards from them, under some widely-spreading, thick-leaved trees, with gnarled trunks and twisted boughs, were some great blocks of sienite, resting fantastically one upon the other, that, with the dark shade of the grove, put us in mind of the old traditions respecting the worship of the Druids.

Harden Melville (1849, plate 16), artist on the Captain Blackwood expedition reported by Jukes, made a sketch of the village on Nagi (Fig. 1). Another person who took part in the 1845 HMS *Fly* visit captained by Francis Blackwood and reported by the naturalist Jukes was John MacGillivray. Four years later, on the 3rd December 1849, MacGillivray returned, now himself as naturalist on the HMS *Rattlesnake*, to that same village on Nagi that he had first visited in 1845. Both expeditions had been sent to the region on an extended mission to chart the Strait's dangerous waters. MacGillivray (1852, II: 35-38) wrote of his experiences during that second visit to the village on Nagi:

The village consists of a single line of huts, which would furnish accommodation for, probably, 150 people. It is situated on the north-west, or leeward side of the island, immediately behind the beach, and in front of a belt of jungle. The huts are long and low, with an arched roof, and vary in length from ten to twenty feet, with an average height of five feet, and a width of six. They consist of a neat framework of strips of bamboo, thatched with long coarse grass. Each hut is usually situated in a small well-fenced enclosure, and opposite it on the beach is the cooking place,



FIG. 1. Village on Nagai in 1845. From Melville (1849).

consisting of a small shed, under which the fire is made. We saw indications of many turtle having lately been cooked here upon a framework of sticks over a small fire[...]

The strip of forest behind the village is traversed in every direction by well beaten paths, chiefly leading to the back part of the island, where, on the slope of the hill in good soil, we found many patches of rude cultivation. [...]

Not far from the village, under the shade of an aged mimusops tree on the outskirts of the wood, we observed a cleared oval space where ten human skulls – of former members of the tribe, as we were informed – were arranged upon a plank raised on stones a foot or so from the ground. [...] In front was a large smooth stone painted red and black, and partially imbedded in the earth, and beside it were some painted human leg and arm bones, shells and other ornaments. Behind, some thirty or forty skulls of turtle were arranged on the ground in several rows forming a triangle.

In a beautiful opening among the trees behind the village we saw an extraordinary screen[...] the purpose of which, so far as we could understand, had some connexion

with the memory of the dead. It extended fifty-six feet in length, with a slight outward curvature, and measured five feet and a half in height. It was formed of a row of poles stuck in the ground, crossed in front by three horizontal strips of bamboo, and covered with cross lattice work. The bars of the screen were daubed over with red paint, and hung with rows of spider shells also painted red. Some poles projecting above the others two to four feet had painted jaws of the dugong and large conch shells (*Fusus proboscidiiferus* (*Syrinx aruanus*)) fixed to the top, and numerous other dugong bones and shells were scattered along the front. On the ground along the foot of the screen was a row of stones painted with black and red in imitation of grotesque faces, and to several of these the old man who acted as cicerone attached the names of persons who were dead. In some the painting was comparatively recent, and the stones appeared to have been placed there singly at different periods to commemorate the death of the heads of families of the tribe. We saw another of these curious funeral screens, – like the first one it was situated in a little glade in the forest, but unlike it the front was covered or thatched with cocoa-nut leaves, and it had a small door-like opening in the centre.

The natives must have left the island either on account of its being now turtle nesting season, or else from the want of water. A small deep well behind the village, apparently the only one in the place, was almost entirely dried up.

On the Central Island of Damuth, Jukes (1847, I: 161) also noted 'a large group of huts'. Jukes and his men landed on the island and were taken to the village by a delegation of Damuth men, leading them 'between the huts to a clear open space at the back of them, shaded by cocoa-nuts and other trees, and which seemed the place of public meeting of the village'. He continues (Jukes, 1847, I: 161-164):

The huts were by far the neatest and best erections of the kind we had yet seen. Each one occupied a quadrangular space, six to eight feet wide, and from ten to fifteen feet long. They had gable-shaped roofs, eight feet high in the centre, and sloping on each side nearly to the ground. The frame of the house was made of bamboo, and thickly covered or thatched with grass and palm-leaves; the front and back walls were also made of small bamboo sticks, upright and fastened close together, the front wall having a small triangular opening for a door, over which hung loose strips of palm leaf. The door looked into a little courtyard, of about ten feet square, in front of the house, strongly fenced with stout posts and stakes, interlaced with palm leaves and young bamboos, and accessible only by a very narrow opening between two of the stoniest posts. In this court-yard was the cooking fire. The different huts and fences were rather irregularly disposed, but placed closely together, so as to leave only narrow winding passages between them. They occupied a space fifty or sixty yards long, by ten or fifteen broad. Behind them was the open place of meeting, on the other side of which, against an old tree, was a semicircular pile or wall of dugongs' skulls about three feet high, many of which were quite fresh, but others rotting with age; in the middle of this was a conical heap of turtles' skulls in a similar state. There must altogether have been some hundreds of skulls of each kind of animal[...]

At the south end of the huts we came to a building much superior to, and different from, any of the rest. It was like a Malay house unfinished, or one of their own smaller huts raised on posts to a height of six or seven feet. The point of the gable was at least fifteen feet from the ground, the roof being supported at each end by two stout posts, about a yard

apart, having their tops ornamented by carved grotesque faces, painted red, white, and black, with much carving and painting below. The lower part, or ground-floor, of this building was open all round, except at one end, where a broad, rudely-constructed staircase led to a platform, from which went the entrance to the upper story: this was floored with stout sticks, and at this end covered with mats; this part was also partitioned off from the other by a bamboo screen. Under the roof hung old cocoa-nuts, green boughs, and other similar things, but nothing to give a decided clue to the object of the building. Whether this was their temple, their place for depositing the dead, or a chief's house, we could not make out. (A subsequent footnote by Jukes notes that 'This house resembled the smaller houses we afterwards saw in New Guinea, and it may have been erected merely in imitation of those the islanders have seen in that country').

On Masig, also in the Central Islands, Jukes (1847, I: 167-168) saw a group of huts, exactly resembling those of Damood (Damuth)[...]

We then went for a walk along the south side of the island, old Garia accompanying us. About half a mile from the village, we came to a single hut, of a different shape from any we had yet seen. It was just like a great bee-hive, ten or twelve feet in diameter at the base, and the same in height, having a thick thatch of grass. A pole protruded from the summit, on which was a large shell (*fusus*), and a small hole or door at one side, partly covered by a board of wood. We thought at first, it might be the receptacle of the dead, but at Darnley (Erub) and Murray (Mer) Islands almost all the houses are of this form, so that this had either been erected in imitation of them, or by some people of those places when on a visit to Masseed (Masig).

MacGillivray (1852, I: 299-300) also briefly visited Tapoga, one of the Eastern Islands. He wrote:

There are many cocoa-nuts, and we saw a village on the north-west side of the island, beautifully situated on the shady skirts of the wood. The huts resemble those of Darnley Island (Erub), being shaped like a haycock or bee-hive, with a projecting central pole ornamented with a large shell or two attached to it. Most of the huts were situated in small enclosures, and there were other portions of ground fenced in with tall bamboo paling.

On 28th March 1845, Jukes (1847, I: 169) visited 'a small village called Keriam (Kiriam)' on Erub in the Eastern Islands. He (Jukes, 1847, I: 172-174) noted:

There were four huts at this spot, all bee-hive shaped, sixteen feet in diameter, and as much in height. They stood in small court-yards, partially surrounded by fences formed of poles of bamboo, stuck upright in the ground, close together, and connected by horizontal rails, to which they were tied by withes. Inside the huts were small platforms covered with mats, apparently bed places; and over head were hung up bows and arrows, clubs, calabashes, rolls of matting, and bundles apparently containing bones, which they did not like our examining. Outside the huts were one or two small open sheds, consisting merely of a raised flat roof, to sit under in the shade, and a grove of very fine cocoa-nut trees surrounding the houses.

Near the path leading to the plantain-ground was an old stump of a tree, three feet high, that had been rudely fashioned at top into the figure of a human face.

March 29 – A large party of us landed this morning at Keriam, where a number of natives from all parts of the island were assembled. Groups of women were sitting round small fires cooking the kind of yam called 'ketai,' and other roots; but they had few more than they were actually consuming. An active barter immediately commenced with our boats' crews[...] Melville and I, with attendant Johns, slipped out of the crowd and walked along Treacherous Bay, where I wished to examine the rocks. When we had gone about half a mile, we heard a native hallooing after us, and he overtook us as we were climbing up some steep ascents at the east end of Treacherous Bay, by a native foot path. He was a fine handsome young fellow, who said his name was Duppa. On the top of the ridge, among some dense jungle, we found several small huts, of a rather different construction from those below, but they seemed uninhabited. Duppa here shouted aloud, and apparently received an answer inaudible to our ears. We then followed the path into a little valley[...]

Soon back at Kiriam, Jukes (1847, I: 178):

had a curiosity to see where the path at the back of the huts went to, (so) I strolled along it, but was presently stopped by a man who called me back, and detained me till two young girls came down the path with a large shell full of water. He then seemed no longer to

have any great objection to my proceeding, and Doodegab coming up accompanied me. The path led through a small plantation ground, and then by the side of a small dry water-course, for three or four hundred yards, till it came to a water-hole, in which there were several gallons of fresh water, of very middling quality.

On the 24th May 1845, Jukes (1847, I: 245) landed again on Kiriam, where he noted: 'I accompanied Captain Blackwood in the first gig to Keriam, outside which much new fencing had been raised [...]'. The party soon travelled to the other side of the island, to the village of Mogor, where Jukes (1847, I: 245-246) observed:

They (the villagers) seemed all very busy making new fences and building new huts. We saw the commencement of one of the latter. Eight or ten stout posts about five feet high, were driven into the ground at equal distances, forming a circle of fifteen feet diameter. Round these, at equal heights, were fastened three hoops of bamboo, both inside and outside the posts, but a space in the lower hoops was left between two of the posts, where the low door would come. They afterwards fasten tall poles of bamboo upright to the hoops pretty closely all round, and bringing their ends together, tie them to a stout centre pole, which rises up from the interior and protrudes through the roof. Onto this frame work they weave and fasten a very thick thatch of grass, and palm-leaves split into thin strips, leaving only one small opening for the door, to enter which they must crouch on the hands and knees. The houses, then, as mentioned before, look just like great beehives.

MacGillivray (1852, II: 45-48) also visited the villages of Kiriam and Mogor on Erub during his time as naturalist on the HMS *Rattlesnake*, Mogor consisting of 'two or three houses only'. One of the huts at Kiriam was described thus:

The huts of Darnley Island (Erub) – together with the inhabitants – have been so fully described in the voyage of the Fly (Jukes, 1847), that it is unnecessary for me to enter upon the subject. The natives always objected to shew us the inside of their huts, many of which we knew were used as dead houses – but Mr Huxley to-day was fortunate enough to induce one of them to allow him to enter his house, and make a sketch of the interior, but not until he had given him an axe as an admission fee. These huts resemble a great bee-hive in shape – a central pole projects beyond the roof, and to this is connected a frame work of bamboo,



FIG. 2. 'Pile-dwelling, Saibai'. From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: Plate XX, fig. 2).

thatched with grass, leaving a single small low entrance to serve as door and window.

On Mer in the Eastern Islands, Jukes (1847, I: 197-198) also observed:

The whole shore here was lined with a continuous row of houses, each in a small court-yard of from ten to twenty yards square. The houses were the same as those of Erroob, as were also all the habits, customs, and appearance of the people. The population here, however, was greater, and the houses, perhaps, larger and more complete than at Erroob. They seemed very clean and neat inside, with raised platforms, covered with mats for bed-places[...] The tops of the houses, as also of the fences of the court-yard, were ornamented by large white shells, and occasionally a skull or two was suspended somewhere near the house, or placed on the stump of a tree and painted red[...] Here and there between the fences of the huts were left narrow passages, giving access to the land at the back, where there were some small plantain-grounds, and groves of cocoa-nuts, immediately behind which rose the steep sides of the hill[...]

MacGillivray (1852, II: 19) also commented on the outlook of houses in the southwestern islands of the Strait. These appear to have been more temporary shelters, although evidence supplied by the shipwrecked Barbara Thompson (Moore, 1978) indicate repeated settlement within circumscribed places:

the huts which the Kowraregas (Kaurareg) and Cape York people put up when the rains commence are usually dome-shaped, four to six feet high, constructed of an arched framework of flexible sticks, one end of each



FIG. 3. 'Huts, Tutu (Tudu)'. From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: Plate XIX, fig. 3).

of which is stuck firmly in the ground, and over this sheets of tea-tree (*Melaleuca*) bark – and sometimes an additional thatch of grass – are placed until it is rendered perfectly water-tight. MacGillivray (1852, II: 19).

In August 1869, Captain John Delargy, of the schooner *Active*, landed on Saibai in the Top Western Islands, describing 'a large village' which

consisted of about 12 or 14 two-storied houses, neatly built of rough timber and roofed with bamboo and palm-leaves. Each house had a double verandah about 12 feet wide all round it. The Chief's house contains two rooms in each story, access being had to the upper rooms by a neat ladder. The apartments on the ground floor were furnished with seats and tables, and the upper ones had sleeping berths raised about 18 inches above the floor all round them. Each room was covered with grass and cane matting, and all were scrupulously clean and neat. A large bamboo 10 or 12 feet long for holding water appeared to be the only domestic utensil in use among them.

[...]in the vicinity of the village are large fields of taro and yams in a high state of cultivation. The coast is lined with dense groves of coconut trees. (Chester, 1869, no pages).

Two years later, Henry Chester (1871: 3-4) commented on the villages on the islands of Badu and Mua:

With some difficulty and after cruising round the island I found their camp in a small bay close to the N.W. point [of Badu]. There were about a dozen canoes on the beach and at anchor in front of their huts, but not a man was visible[...]

It was only after numerous attempts to communicate with the Italeega of Banks island [Mua] that I at length succeeded in overcoming their timidity and inducing them to trade. Living in perpetual dread of their powerful neighbors of Badoo [Badu] and Marbiack [Mabuyag] they are compelled to be constantly shifting their camps, which they take great care to conceal on the side to seaward; so that I passed and repassed several without any idea of their vicinity[...] I had no means of estimating their number owing to their distribution in several camps, but they cannot be very numerous.

There are many later accounts of villages in Torres Strait, but by the 1870s these were undergoing rapid change as a result especially of incoming European and South Sea Islander pearl shelling and missionary activities (e.g. cf. Bayton, 1969). Here we have restricted our historical sketch to those observations made during the earliest European contact period, that period of time documenting aspects of village life prior to the radical transformations of the late 1800s. We present in a later section of this paper details of the way villages, and houses, changed with the onset of colonialism.

TORRES STRAIT HOUSE TYPES PRIOR TO EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

The archaeologist and anthropology student Anthony Wilkin, together with anthropologist Alfred Haddon (1912), have noted that the pre-European contact village houses of Torres Strait, as documented in the early ethnohistoric literature, may be divided into four regional types:

1. Two-storied pile houses with a permanent ladder to access the top storey, typical of the Top Western islands, and sometimes found in the Western Islands also (including Badu) (Fig. 2). Such pile dwellings were 'built mainly of bamboo, and the roofs were thatched and the sides enclosed with the pandanus leaf' (Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: 99). They typically seem to have measured *c.* 10m in length, 5-6m in width and 5-6m in height (Murray, 1876: 456; Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: 100). These are similar to houses commonly found along the southern Papuan coast.
2. In the Western and Central Islands, the predominant house type consisted of an 'oblong, low structure built on the ground with a roof sloping on each side to the ground, or in some there were very low side walls' (Haddon, 1935: 299) (Fig. 3). During his first expedition to Torres Strait in 1888, then-zoologist (and subsequently anthropologist) Alfred Haddon observed on

Badu 'huts consisting of little more than two sloping walls meeting like a roof, evidently the indigenous type' (Haddon, 1935: 63). Haddon and co-expeditioner Wilkin spent some time on Mabuyag during their subsequent expedition of 1898, where they note (Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: 97-98):

Before the arrival of foreigners in Mabuig the natives say that they lived in houses built on the ground and we have sketches by the natives confirming this. From their account the houses varied in length and were generally not more than 1.8m (6 ft) high. The floors were of white sand covered with layers of grass and mats, hence a bed, *toie*, was sometimes called *apa-sik* (*apa*, ground). The roof-walls were composed of grass and tea-tree bark. Some of the largest of them had as many as ten doors which were so low that it was necessary to go in crouching almost on all fours. They were built on a framework like those of old Mawata, and their section was similar to that of a Gothic arch. Women and children lived in these houses, the men, or at all events the bachelors, sleeping in the *kwikwi-iut* and *kwod*. With regard to the structure of these houses it may be confidently said that it was of the simplest. The median posts, *sarukag*, were in vogue, not the lateral posts as at Kiwai, at any rate in the ordinary houses; the ridge-pole was called *tòd*.

The name *kwikwi-iut* signifies head-house in both senses of the word. The description of the head-house by Gizu was supplemented by a drawing by him[...] It was built on piles, and had a door at either end, and reddened skulls and jaws were hung around. [...] Coco-nut palm leaves were placed on the roof, gable ends and eaves, and the posts, *pasi kag*, were painted red. It seems that there were originally two of these houses in Mabuig, one probably belonging to each phratry [...] in them arms were kept and the skulls were those of enemies killed in war. Women and small boys were not allowed to enter them (Fig. 4).

A *kwod* [...] was still to be seen in Mabuig in 1888 (Fig. 5), it consisted of four walls with one wide entrance and a light flat roof made of coco-nut palm leaves; it was about 7.5m (25 ft) long, 4.5m (15 ft) broad, and 1.8m (6 ft) high. Several authorities declared that the *kwod* served as a place of meeting when the *kwikwi-iut* was too hot or overcrowded, and that the men and boys of a certain age slept in either indifferently. In October 1888, a number of natives from other islands visited Mabuig, and the bachelors took up their quarters in the *kwod*.

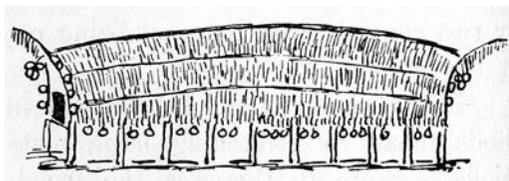


FIG. 4. 'Head-house, Mabuia, after a sketch by Tom'. From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: fig. 134).

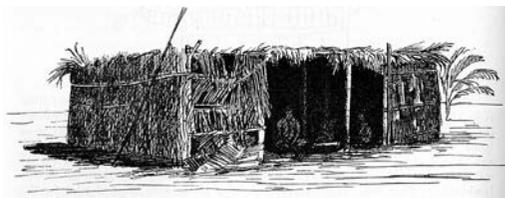


FIG. 5. 'Kwod at Bau, Mabuia'. From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: fig. 135).



FIG. 6. 'Three huts, *mugi mud*, covered with tea-tree bark, sketched at Aiginisan, Muralug (Muralag) [...] in Sept. 1888'. From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: fig. 131).

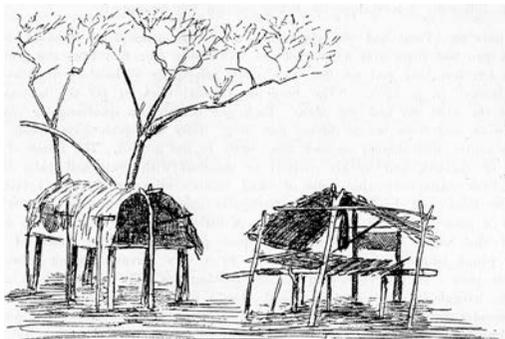


FIG. 7. 'Two huts, *kai mud*, on piles, sketched [...] at Aiginisan, Muralug (Muralag), in Sept. 1888'. From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: fig. 132).

3. For the southwestern islands off the tip of Cape York, including Muralag (the islands belonging to the Kaurareg), and the Western Island of Mua, Wilkin & Haddon (1912: 95) note:

We were informed in 1898 that the old style of house in Muralug (Muralag) consisted of little more than a simple gable roof of the bark of the tea-tree[...] with the gables filled in, resting directly on the ground. Sometimes they were small and intended for one family, in case they had but a single entrance. Others were larger, about 3.5–4.5m (12–15 feet) long, and about 2m (6–7 feet) broad, and the house was so low that a man could not stand upright inside. There were three very low, small entrances on one side only, to these were given the following names, *kala pasa*, hinder door, *dada pasa*, middle door, and *kurubad pasa*, a corner doorway[...]; inside the house in front of each entrance was a fireplace and along the length of the house was a clear space for the mats on which the people slept. Such a house would serve for three families (Figs 6, 7).

According to the accounts of the Mabuia people, the houses of the Moa [Mua] natives were similar to those of Mabuia, some of them had doors, and the Moa people were always ready to abandon them for a time and

live in the bush among the great hills on the eastern side of the island [...]

4. The predominant house type in the Eastern Islands was the beehive structure repeatedly commented upon by the early European sailors (Figs 8–10). These were called *meta* (or *kaubkaub meta*) (Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: 101) by local Islanders, and appear to have been largely confined to the Eastern and, to a lesser extent, Central Islands. They were typically 6–7m in diameter and 4m in height, with the central pole rising close to 5m in height; they could vary in size, however, with smaller ones measuring about 3.5m in diameter, and the larger ones reaching around 10m in diameter. Beehive houses were thatched with 'dry grass, and the bundles were gathered in together at the top from which the centre post projected about eighteen inches; it was laced on to the laths of the framework by long creepers [...]' (Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: 101). Wilkin & Haddon (1912: 101–102) describe the construction and structure of a moderately sized beehive house they saw on Mer in the Eastern Islands in greater detail:

The first operation in the building of the round house was the delimitation of the circumference. This was done by simply making a trail with one foot in the sand. Twenty stout posts, *teter*, were then put in at intervals of about three feet so as to form a circle, they projected above



FIG. 8. Village at Erub. From Melville (1849).

the ground five feet. Four split bamboos were fastened round these posts, the uppermost band being near the top. To these *kosker teibur* [...] were then tied the *pèk* in four sections, each section being done by five men. The general direction of the *pèk* is transverse from side to side rather than from bottom to top. The wooden main-post, *seseri*, was then dragged in through the opening left for the door and set up in the centre. The *pèk* alone, arranged as they were in four groups whose ends overlapped and formed diagonal patterns, gave the house almost the appearance of a rounded quadrangle. There were fifteen *pèk* in all, four a side, the number being reduced to three on the eastern section which formed an arch over the door. The ends of these fifteen split bamboos were tied outside the first two (? the upper two) rows of *kosker tiebur* and must have added enormously to the strength of the roof. Next the wooden *lemlem* (which correspond to the rafters of the Kiwai house [...]) were fastened to all the *kosker teibur* so that the lower ends rested on the ground while the upper converged and were tied to the centre pole at the top. The underlying *pèk* which they crossed served to keep the curve true and symmetrical. Laths (*tum pèk*) of split bamboo were added and the frame

was ready to receive the thatch. The door was triangular and faced the sea (which lay to the east). It measured 2ft 3in high \times 2ft 3in. across the base, and its side posts were neatly bound with grass. Such a doorway could only be entered on all-fours. At the centre of each hemisphere enclosed by the *pèk* was a St Andrew's cross of split bamboo measuring about 3ft high \times 1ft 6in across (between perpendiculars). The thatch at the bottom was called *mais*, that at the top *akur*[...]

Wilkin & Haddon (1912: 103) give further details about the history and use of this house, noting that the fireplace was located in 'an open space in front of the doorway which [...] measured about nine feet long by four broad'; and noting of beehive houses generally that 'The fireplace was between the central pole and the entrance.' They also note that 'Groups of these houses were enclosed in an *uteb* or compound and a high fence served to keep out the wind. Formerly a bunch of mottled cowrie shells (*mòkep*) were tied over the door to give notice of the entrance of a visitor'.

Beehive houses were not the only house type in the Eastern Islands, although they were the

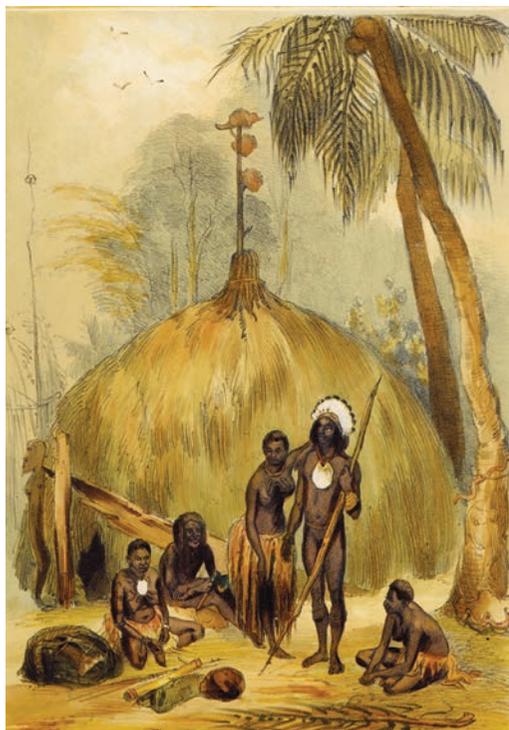


FIG. 9. 'Hut, and natives of Darnley Island (Erub)'.
From Melville (1849).

predominant one to be discussed by early European explorers. Wilkin & Haddon (1912: 103-104) thus describe a rectangular house, c. 4.5m long by slightly less than 3m wide and 3m high, with one rounded end, on Mer. They note that the entrance to this house faced the sea, and large valves of giant clam shells were placed on a platform at the back of the house 'to catch rain and to hold the supplies of fresh water for daily use.' They also note that in the house 'The fireplace of the house had been made anywhere, but the freshest ashes were in the middle though slightly nearer the closed than the open end'.

VILLAGE LIFE IN TORRES STRAIT DURING THE EARLY EUROPEAN CONTACT PERIOD

As noted above, published *archaeological* research has not yet focused on Torres Strait village forms, and so far in this paper we have restricted our discussions to the earliest written accounts of European travellers. Later ethnographic material nevertheless records considerable changes to villages and house forms following sustained

contact with Pacific Islanders and Europeans after the late 1860s to early 1870s. Pacific Islanders arrived in Torres Strait to work in the newly established pearling and *bêche-de-mer* fisheries, or came as teachers attached to the London Missionary Society's (LMS) Papuan Mission.

The diversification of architectural styles, the establishment of new markets and processing centres, the impacts of diseases, and challenges to the existing political and social formations that came through the new Christian religion, amongst other factors, contributed to a profound cultural transition in the form and demographics of Torres Strait Islander villages. Ethnographic evidence written after 1871 suggests that while major 'external' factors caused significant changes to the Torres Strait economic and political complex, cultural change as manifested in the village was mediated through the local experiences of Torres Strait Islanders. The most visible corollary of the 'colonial entanglement' was the transition to a Pacific island house form and the development of large centralised villages centred around the Church, particularly evident after the turn of the 20th century (Mullins, 1995; Shnukal, 2004). Modifications to the 'Pacific template' occurred on an individual and community level and incorporated pre-contact house forms and construction techniques. Traditional Torres Strait Islander house structures continued to be built alongside the Pacific form at least until the late 19th century.

The following section surveys the ethnographic literature dating from the introduction of Christianity in 1871 until the turn of the 20th century, reviewing the transition in housing style during the late 19th century. This section necessarily focuses upon the physical dimensions of the Pacific island house form and village layout rather than engaging in a critique of colonial historiography evident in the ethnography. Our intention is to develop a framework of what villages looked like ethnographically, and thus, by identifying the salient archaeological features of villages, assist in the identification and analysis of Torres Strait Islander settlement and culture change through time for the early missionary period.

TABLE 1. List of Kala Lagaw Ya and Miriam Mir terms for house features (Haddon, 1912:106).

House feature	Kala Lagaw Ya (Mabuiag derivative)	Meriam Mir
Beam of wall (inner horizontal)	<i>Bal-iai-pui</i>	<i>Kerem-teter</i>
Beam of wall (outer horizontal)		<i>Kosker teibur; mui pèk</i>
Cross-beam	<i>Bal kaputai pui</i>	
Purlin of roof	<i>Bal-iai-pui</i>	<i>Mui pèk</i>
Door	<i>Pasa</i>	<i>Pau</i>
Doorway	<i>Pasa, pasa-gud</i>	<i>Te, meta te</i>
Door-jamb	<i>Pasa-gudau tuda [or tòd]</i>	<i>Te-lu</i>
Posts outside door		<i>Tera atatmi lu</i>
End of house, corner	<i>Kurubad</i>	<i>Kop</i>
End of large ridge-pole	<i>Gizu</i>	
Lath supporting thatch	<i>Bera pui</i>	<i>Tum pèk</i>
Lean-to house, porch, verandah or eaves	<i>Iut</i>	<i>Maisu</i>
Lintel	<i>Pasa-gudau tuda [or tòd]</i>	
Median or central post	<i>Saru-kag</i>	<i>Seseri</i>
Pile	<i>Pasi, kag</i>	
Platform bed		<i>Sik or sik bau</i>
Posts of inner side of house	<i>Pasi kag</i>	<i>Teter</i>
Posts of outer side of house	<i>Pasiu pui</i>	<i>Teter lemlem</i>
Rafter	<i>Sau</i>	
Rafter (inner)	<i>Barbat or babado puidai bera pui</i>	<i>Asis lu</i>
Rafter (outer)	<i>Kadaka tra pui</i>	<i>Lemlem</i>
Ridge-pole (inner)	<i>Tòd</i>	<i>Tot</i>
Roof	<i>Toit or tòd</i>	<i>Tot or meta tum</i>
Thatch	<i>Borda or burdo, kamug, mugud</i>	<i>Akur, maisu</i>
Inner thatch	<i>Bai or bōi</i>	
Thatch bands	<i>Bordau pui</i>	<i>Marep pèk</i>
Tie-beam	<i>Bal-iai-pui</i>	
Wall	<i>Pasi</i>	<i>Bir</i>
Window	<i>Arkat</i>	

VILLAGE CHANGES IN THE
EARLY MISSIONARY PERIOD:
PREVALENCE OF THE PACIFIC
ISLAND HOUSE FORM

The introduction of the Pacific island house form was not uniformly embraced by Torres Strait Islanders at the time of initial missionary contact (Mullins, 1995: 174), the traditional house forms appear to have been built contemporaneously with the Pacific island form for some 40 years after sustained contact with Europeans and Pacific Islanders. However, by the 20th century the 'pre-contact' Torres Strait house forms were almost universally replaced by the Pacific style.

The naturalist, Luigi Maria D'Albertis thus wrote of the distinctive beehive structures found in the Eastern islands of Torres Strait (1880: 237): 'When I came to the village, I found the houses were constructed in two ways, some being like beehives, the others four sided, and I was told the former are built in imitation of the missionary's house'.

In 1887, Julian 'The Vagabond' Thomas similarly wrote (1887: 375): 'Two kinds of architecture were to be seen – square, an idea imported by the missionaries; and round with beehive roofs. The buildings were all much better than the ordinary run of dwellings in the New Hebrides'.

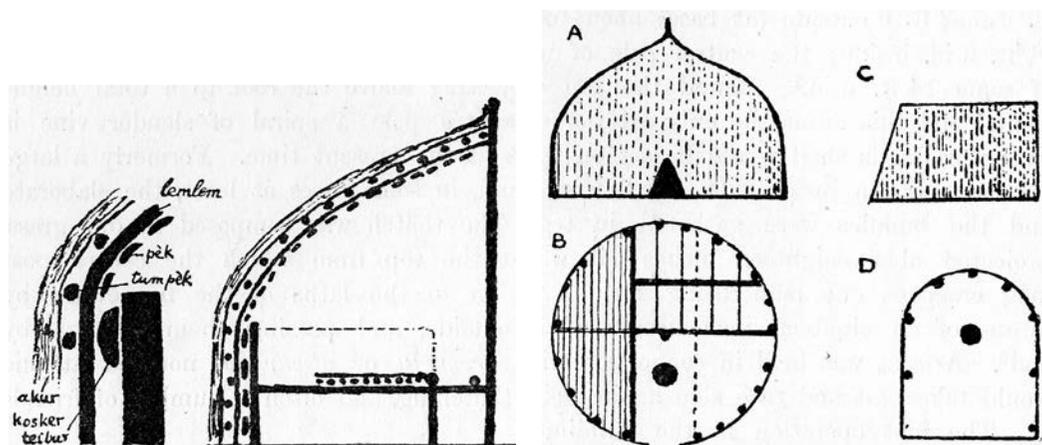


FIG. 10. Left: 'General and detailed sections of a Miriam round house' (from Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: fig. 137). Right: 'A-wB, elevation and plan of a Miriam round house; C-D, elevation and plan of an eud meta on Mer' (from Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: fig. 138).

The extent to which the 'South Sea' type (herein referred to as the 'Pacific islands house form') gained prevalence by the end of the 19th century is suggested by A.C. Haddon in 1898 (1912: 93) when he wrote that a 'somewhat variable South Sea type of house now prevails everywhere'. And again, (Haddon 1901: 47): 'All the houses of the eastern islanders were formerly circular and quite small. There is only one beehive house remaining in Murray Island'.

By the end of the 19th century, ethnographic writings testify to the adoption of the Pacific island house form throughout the Western, Top Western, Central and Eastern Islands of Torres Strait. However, it should be noted that missionary and pearling attention largely concentrated upon those more densely populated islands or those islands close to economically viable pearling fields. As such, most of the ethnographic accounts of Torres Strait villages focuses upon these islands (Mabuyag, Mer, Erub) and largely neglects those smaller islands only seasonally occupied or with small resident populations (cf. Shnukal, 2004). Consequently, little is known of the transition of the Pacific island house form in this broader context.

THE PACIFIC ISLAND HOUSE FORM: WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE?

The Pacific Island house form probably originated in the Loyalty Islands (New Caledonia) sometime after the establishment of the mission school and seminary at Lifu in the first half of the 18th century (Ray, 1917: 258). Prior to

his removal from Lifu following conflict with the French authorities and the Marist priests in 1869, Samuel Mcfarlane – the missionary who instigated the LMS Papuan Mission which established a foothold in Torres Strait in 1871 – wrote of the villages at Lifu (1873: 15):

When we arrived they built them very low, without windows, and only one small door. Now, however, they are much higher, neater, and better, having two doors, two windows, and two rooms. They are built by placing posts firmly in the ground about 6 feet apart; to these the wall plate is tied, and between these smaller sticks are erected, and to these again others, about the thickness of one's finger, are put on horizontally and so close together that they almost touch each other. All are bound by strong native vines. The bark is peeled from all the wood, and even from the vines, and they are fastened together very neatly and with great regularity. Two long, forked posts are placed deeply in the ground, upon which the ridge-pole is put and firmly secured by vines. The rafters are then raised, and the sticks placed across them as below. The whole is covered with long grass or the leaves of the sugar cane, put on as country houses are thatched in England. Sometimes on the lower part mats are put between the sticks and the grass.

The floor is covered first with plaited coconut leaves, then with well-made mats; the latter are also used for sheets and blankets.

Around the house there is a fence (*hage*) formed of large, high posts (*hōc*) standing on their ends, and close together: this is to enclose a

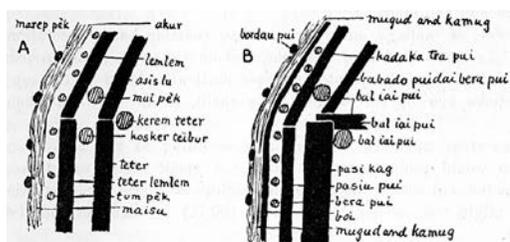


FIG. 11. Cross-section of wall from Pacific island house form. A: Mer (with details in Meriam Mir); B: Mabuyag (with details in Kala Lagaw Ya). From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: 106).

space in which they sit around a fire to talk and eat, preserved from the winds and from observation.

It is most likely that this form was transferred and modified to the Torres Strait by Pacific Islander teachers in 1871, or introduced by Pacific Islanders working in the pearling and bêche-de-mer industries. Thomas (1887: 374) wrote of the teacher's square hut on Masig in 1887: 'It was a four sided grass building, which, in the New Hebrides, would have been a first-class school or church. Here it served as a house of prayer as well as the residence of the pastor'.

While there is a degree of variability in design, in general the Pacific island house was rectangular in form, consisting of a gable roof with the hanging roof-line terminating at the exterior walls (see Figs 17, 18 for a reconstruction of the generic Pacific style house). The frame consisted of a quadrangular series of internal and external posts reinforced by cross-beams supporting the roof extremities. The roof-line was supported by a ridge-pole held in place by two large median posts some 2.5 to 3.5 metres high. The two median posts were either forked or were joined to the ridge-post by a mortise joint. Two symmetrical unglazed windows were spaced either side of a narrow doorway on the front side; however, these were occasionally omitted. Exterior and possibly interior walls were plaited with coconut palm-leaves and/or thatched grass and reinforced by tie-beams (see Figs 11, 12). A list of Kala Lagaw Ya house features and their Miriam Mir equivalents are found in Table 1.

Wilkin & Haddon (1912: 93-119) provide the most comprehensive descriptions of the typical Pacific island house form in Volume 4 of the *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition*, 'Houses'. Most of these observa-



FIG. 12. Construction of the Pacific island house form on Mer. From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: Plate XXVIII, fig. 2).

tions come from a brief period in 1888, and an extended fieldtrip in 1898. They wrote (Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: 107-108):

Fig. 142a [see Figs 12, 16, 17] represents a Miriam house not yet finished, but the skeleton made it easy to take accurate measurements and to observe the construction which was typical of all the "South Sea" houses of Mer, though the height of the side walls was somewhat abnormal. It measured 28ft \times 16ft broad. Its height was 14ft, that of the walls 8ft. The house was parallel to the sea though some hundred yards from it, and its back was turned to the road. On the sea front was a door 5ft 6in \times 2ft 9in at a distance of 11ft 9in from the north corner. The median posts were three feet in circumference at about a yard from the ground. They stood about 8ft 6in from the end walls and in the middle line. The main ridge-pole was mortised into their tops and projected 18in at either end. The second and exterior ridge-pole rested on the upper ends of the *asis lu*, while the *lemlem* converged at the top and were tied to the interior main ridge-pole, flush with the *asis lu*. The *kosker teibur* were three *asides*, and the *mui pek* two. The end walls were similar in construction. The side posts were hardly inferior in solidity to the median posts and, as this is the rule in Mer houses, the superfluous strength of the side walls would seem to account for the absence of defects consequent on the neglect of tie-beams other than those afforded by the end walls. The construction of the side walls which is far more massive, though hardly more complicated, than that of the round house, is best understood by reference to the section in fig. 140a (Fig. 11). The thatch was laid on in bundles, beginning at the bottom where a different name was applied to it, *mais*, from that used for the upper portions, *akur*. This method did not seem to be due to

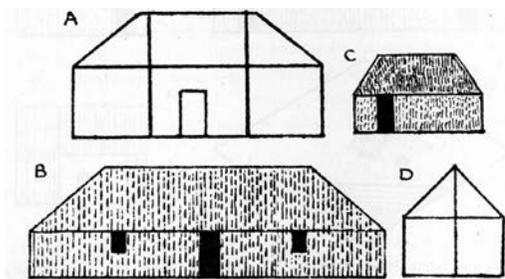


FIG. 13. Pacific island house form. From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: 108).

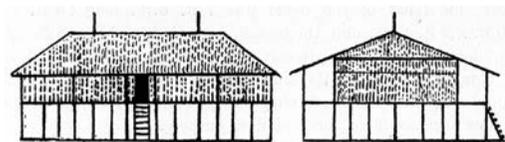


FIG. 14. Pacific style house on piles, Mer. From Wilkin & Haddon (1912: 109).

anything more practical than the dictates of fashion. Windows did not exist before the introduction of “South Sea” architecture, and they do not vary much in size or position from the examples here quoted. The side walls in fig. 142a (Fig. 13) are higher than usual; ordinarily doors are of the same height as the walls, and they may or may not have a wooden frame and threshold....

And again (Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: 108),

Fig. 142b [Fig. 13] is a typical “South Sea” house (that of Jimmy Rice and Debe Wali). Its dimensions were 40ft × 18ft × 13ft high. The side and end walls and door were 5ft 2in high. The doors were in the middle of the sides facing the sea and the road respectively, and were about 2ft broad. That facing the road had been temporarily closed up as it was not much used. The walls were of layers of plaited palm leaves which overlapped one another, while the roof was of the ordinary thatch. The ends of the ridge-pole were 9ft from the end walls of the house, thus making a hipped roof[...], and the thatch over the ridge-pole was finished off neatly with a strong plait. Two windows faced the sea, close under the eaves, 2ft × 18in, and in the position shewn in the figure. Inside the house was a floor raised 15 inches above the sand. Piles, *bau*, supported cross pieces, *mui bau*, and these transverse planks, *sik bau*, both the latter being of split bamboo. This platform covered the whole floor of the house except a gangway four feet wide from door to door. The two halves of the *bau* where they fronted

the gap were finished off with a single bamboo, *bau*, laid crossways. In the middle of this central gangway was the fireplace. In most houses the platforms were higher and confined to a more limited area, which seemed to vary entirely according to the taste or the requirements of the inhabitant.

Wilkin & Haddon (e.g. 1912: 107, 108, 109, 110) commented that Pacific island style houses on Mer often faced the sea. This orientation appears also to have been replicated at least on Mabuyag (see Fig. 16). They wrote (Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: 109):

A very similar, but rather larger house, was that of Sisa. As usual it faced the sea and had its back to the road. Dimensions, 44ft × 28ft × 13ft, side and end walls measured 5ft 9in high. A door 2ft wide and two windows 1ft × 1ft 6in were on each of the sides, all in wooden frames. Here the windows were placed 6in below the eaves. The *marep pèk* band consisted of two horizontal strips of bamboo between which were short strips arranged trellis fashion.

MODIFICATIONS TO THE TEMPLATE. The general Pacific island house form was often locally modified, reflecting regional stylistic trends and building techniques in housing construction. These variations to the general theme reflected the cultural diversity and influences in housing design, embracing ideas from the individual Torres Strait Islander forms, European additions, and Papua New Guinea. Such modifications to the template were:

Raised floor section. One of the more distinctive regional variations in Pacific island house forms occurred in the construction of raised floor and/or bed platforms. Haddon (1912: 110) remarks that unlike on Mer, Mabuyag houses were rarely equipped with bed platforms.

The floor of the Pacific island house was often raised above a central earthen gangway by planks of split bamboo. Haddon wrote (1901: 47):

We found Gadodo had a large grass house of the now usual South Sea type – that is, oblong, with one doorway and no other opening. In the interior, along the end walls, were bamboo stages, about three to four feet from the ground, which served as beds.

Some forms of the pre-European contact period Torres Strait house form, notably the Eastern Island beehive structures and pile dwellings at Saibai, were built with raised floor sections or



FIG. 15. Finial of a house on Mer. From Haddon (1912: Plate XII, fig. 8).

sleeping platform as cited in the earliest ethnographic literature. In other instances, woven mats were placed over the earthen floors.

Piles. The Pacific island house form was modified to reflect the convention in some of the Torres Strait house forms to raise houses on piles. Wilkin & Haddon (1912) assigned this to a coastal Papuan influence. However, this is questionable considering that many of the house forms in the Central, Top Western and Western islands also utilised this technology. Wilkin & Haddon (1912: 105) wrote:

At Murray there are a few houses built on piles constituting a combination of South Sea and New Guinea architecture, and somewhat resembling houses at Hula and elsewhere in New Guinea where foreign influence has been felt.

Pacific island house styles constructed on piles have also been noted on Mua (White, 1925: 43), Mabuyag (see Fig. 16) and Mer. Haddon (1912: 109) wrote of the Mer houses: 'Marau's house, is an example, and one is also seen in pl. XXI. fig. 1 [Fig. 14], 31ft × 23ft broad over all × 13ft high. The piles were 4ft 6in, and palm tree stumps had been utilised'.

Shape. The general Pacific island house template was modified both in size and shape to suit the



FIG. 16. Village on Mabuyag. From Hurley (1921), 'Mabuiag'.

requirements of its builder/owner. For instance, Haddon (1912: 106-107) cites a diamond-shaped house with a single central median post:

At Mer there was a building with a central post and diamond-shaped ground plan but there was no evidence whatever to connect it with the round house, and it was very likely, that its owner Dick claimed for it, a freak of his imagination. Its greatest length between corners was about 35ft, and a line connecting them would have lain roughly parallel to the seashore. Its greatest breadth was about 21 feet. Each of the four sides measured 20ft and there was an opening in the two which faced the sea about 3ft from the extreme ends, 4ft 6in × 2ft, closed by ordinary wooden doors set in frames the height of the side walls. The height of the house to the topmost point would be about 14ft, and the central pole projected somewhat beyond. Several mapepèk bands confined the thatch, and palm stumps had been utilised in the construction. Inside were two platforms about 2ft 6in high.

Finials. Characteristic of many of the pre-European contact Torres Strait housing forms, the finials of the protruding median posts were often decorated with the large *Cassis* sp. or *Syrinx aruanus* shells (Haddon 1912: 101, fig. 5; cf. Haddon 1912: 104) (see Fig. 15). The ethnography suggests that such modifications appear to be limited to the Eastern Islands. Fences, such as those surrounding *kod* sites and gardens, were also decorated with these large shells (Haddon, 1912: 119), a characteristic that occurred across Torres Strait.

Verandahs. The same house depicted in Fig. 14 was constructed with a European or coastal

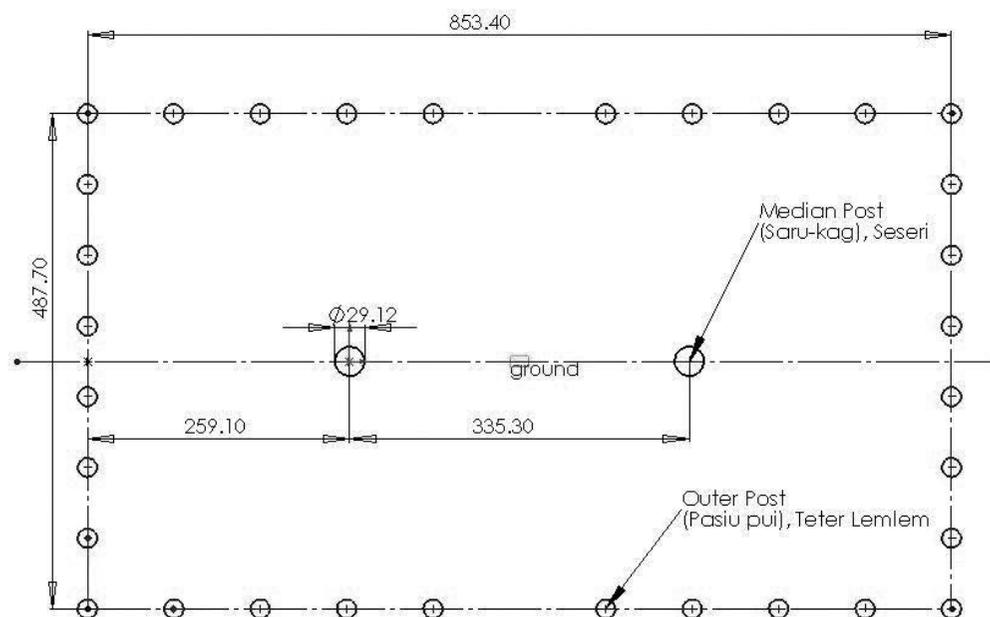


FIG. 17. Plan of Pacific island style house described by Haddon (1912: 107-108). Terms in brackets are in Kala Lagaw Ya, those not in brackets are in Miriam Mir. All dimensions are in cm.

Papuan-inspired verandah. Haddon notes (1912: 109):

There were two verandahs, one at the back facing the road, the other at the front which faced the sea. They were 3ft 6in wide. The doors (that at the back closed up with palm leaves) were in the middle of each long side, 3ft wide and 4ft 6in high. The roofs of both verandahs were added outside the main roof of the house and were obviously an addition to it. Though they doubtless formed part of the original plan, the clumsiness of this overlapping arrangement (which would allow the rain to fall off the main roof into the verandahs) shewed that it was new and unfamiliar. The verandah eaves overhung about 18 inches. The median posts projected 2ft 6in above the roof and, being of bamboo, were incapable of decoration. The thatch was normal. A six-rung ladder led to the door at the back. Under the eaves ran the usual *marep pèk* band. The floor beams were of bamboo, and the top of the thatch plaited together.

CONFIGURATION OF EARLY EUROPEAN CONTACT PERIOD VILLAGES. Wilkin & Haddon (1912) suggest that the spatial configuration of residential structures within a village probably did not undergo significant

changes during the early missionary period. They wrote (Wilkin & Haddon, 1912: 110):

Most of the houses at Murray Island were grouped together in compounds, *uteb*, within a fence, and this arrangement seems always to have prevailed. On the other hand, at Mabuiag, the houses form regular streets and are arranged with a considerable amount of regularity. The old village may have been arranged in a somewhat similar manner, but we know that the missionaries brought practically all the families together to form a single village in the island. *Giam* or *mudau giam* is the name for a house-site and the cleared space or street between the houses is called *sugu*. The *sugu* is common property, when necessary it is cleaned by the women, each woman tidying the space in front of her house as far as the middle line; the coco-nut palms growing in this *sugu* belong to their several planters.

Further research is required to properly assess any regional differentiation in the spatial layout of residential structures during the early missionary period. However, it is likely that to some degree at least these largely conformed with pre-1871 village configurations. The teachers' initial material dependence upon their hosts largely denied the former the ability to dictate

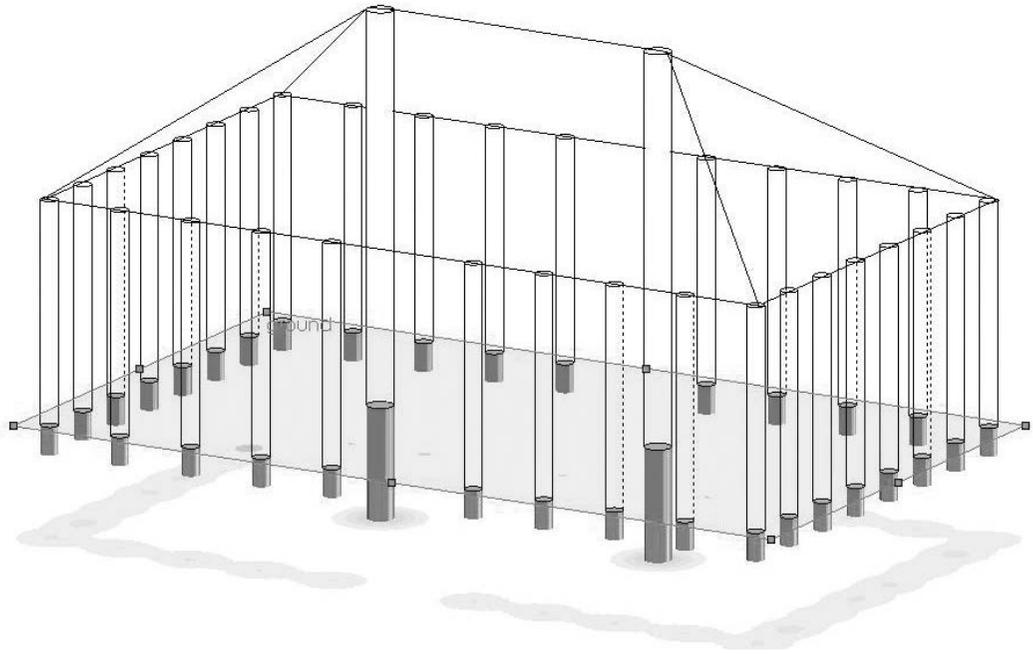


FIG. 18. 3-D drawing of the same house as shown in Fig. 17, with probable distribution of sub-surface features. Relative dimensions are estimates.

terms during the 1870s, despite their attempts to significantly alter settlement patterns. We know, for example, that the Lifuan teacher Kerisiano was originally placed on Badu to missionise that island. However, as the Badugal refused to settle permanently in one location, Kerisiano soon left and established a church and school on nearby Mua (Mcfarlane, 1874: 14-15). However, the Muagal did not live with Kerisiano at least until 1876 (Mcfarlane, 1876: 1).

By the late 1870s, significant cultural sites such as head-houses and *kod* sites, for instance, were destroyed by Pacific Islander teachers and pearl-ers (Fraser, 1960: 26), and teachers were 'instructed to destroy the kooda and deliberately built their first grass churches on these sites' (Shnukal, 2004: 333). Certainly, the journals and letters of European missionaries from the London Missionary Society considered societal change as a function of successful conversion from 'dark to light' that required a reorientation of the moral realm and its physical manifestation (including housing conventions). Where the sacred or political conflicted with this program, where possible the physical landscape was consciously manipulated to reflect the 'new order of things'. Anna Shnukal (2004: 334)

describes this as colonial rule 'spatialised through a geometry of dwelling space'. By the late 19th century, the church and school house figured prominently in the organisation of Torres Strait culture, and Islanders had begun to relocate and live in large centralised village settlements (see Mullins, 1995: 173-174; Shnukal, 2004: 334).

However, it should also be remembered that villages are complex structures that embody both the discrete and overt elements that constitute the economic and political arrangements of social life. Sites that were allocated for the teachers' residence(s) and the church/school buildings were, at least during the early phase of Pacific Islanders colonisation, largely determined through negotiation and mediated by Torres Strait Islanders' expectations that existing land tenure and social arrangements were to be respected.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

From these ethnohistoric observations of Torres Strait villages and houses, a number of archaeological implications emerge. The salient features of both village and house structures documented by the early European explorers and settlers will prove critical to historicising the ethnographically documented Islander village

forms, for it is these early historical records that may allow us to track back in time the origins of known village characteristics, and in doing so enable us to archaeologically trace their historical foundations. It is also these details that enable us to recognise key features of village sites in the region, to allow greater confidence in the archaeological identification of hitherto unknown village sites. Let us begin by identifying key structural features that can be expected to have left material traces of Torres Strait's 18th and 19th century villages as documented by the early European seafarers prior to any fundamental changes to house and village forms.

By their definition as places where people aggregate for residential purposes, village sites can be expected to possess 1), houses; 2), specialised activity areas (such as cooking locations and public meeting places); and 3), places where the by-products of everyday activity have accumulated, such as food middens. The ethnohistoric literature on Torres Strait villages is consistent with these expectations, indicating the following structural features:

PRE-EUROPEAN COLONIAL PERIOD ARCHAEOLOGY.

1. Relative permanency of settlements, although villages were not necessarily lived in year-round. In the case of the southwestern islands, favoured places such as Port Lihou were residential foci and returned to repeatedly, but some of the individual houses were likely of shorter duration and of less sturdy construction than those of other parts of Torres Strait, being newly built seasonally.
2. Villages were often located close to the sea, near places where canoes could be moored (Torres Strait Islanders were, and on the islands continue to be today, highly specialised sea peoples).
3. Within the village could be found a number of houses, mostly of one general size and construction, but sometimes also including rarer house types, and/or houses markedly different in size (such as men's houses). Individual houses tended to have internal hearths.
4. Individual houses were sometimes fenced in small enclosures, but this was not always so.
5. Within the village could also be found a number of specialised activity areas, including earth ovens (known as *amai* in the Western Islands) where turtle, dugong and other items were cooked, meeting places, and dancing areas. Some of these specialised places could have their own wooden structures, such as shade platforms, cooking sheds, or screens. Such specialised activity areas may be positioned near individual houses, or further distant. Many villages appear to have had courtyards or public compounds, likely meeting places where, amongst other things, trade with visitors took place.
6. Water storage facilities in the form of shells (most notably giant clams), sometimes in considerable numbers, were positioned to catch dripping water from house roofs, especially in the Eastern Islands.
7. Fences were common features of villages, especially in the Eastern Islands.
8. A range of building types, most notably the houses but also sheds, screens and fences, required posts and thus post-holes.
9. The tops of exposed posts were often decorated with enduring material objects, in particular large shells such as *Syrinx aruanus*; the posts were sometimes carved.
10. Near but outside individual villages were other, specialised activity areas, such as gardens, wells, bamboo groves, and ritual places. The latter were usually positioned in liminal spaces, places hidden from the sight of everyday village life, such as within forest groves or on hilltops. Wells (and other water sources) appear to have been carefully guarded from visitors, as evident from the reception that Jukes got on 28th March 1845 when at the village of Kiriam on Erub (in this context, see also McNiven's (2001) discussion of the ritual mutilation of crew members of the *Shah Hormuzear* and *Chesterfield* on Erub in 1793).
11. Bamboo groves and coconut trees were usually found near villages, although they could also occur in non-residential locations frequented by people (see also Laade, 1971). However, as a general rule villages tended to possess coconut trees.
12. Individual houses were accessed by well-worn paths, with different locations within the village, and between the village and other specialised activity areas, being linked by foot paths.
13. Individual villages could be of varied sizes, in some cases supporting large populations numbering in excess of 100, in other cases supporting considerably smaller populations.
14. Some islands appear to have supported one village only (e.g. Nagi), others a number of villages (e.g. Badu, Mua). On Mua, the fear of inter-island raids resulted in the periodic shifting of camps to the hinterland and to the existence of multiple villages, but we do not know for how long this was the case.
15. Additionally, we can expect midden materials to be relatively dense in old village sites due to the cumulative effects of refuse build-up over long periods of time (months, years, decades and perhaps even centuries). Given the highly structured nature of village life – as Stevenson (1982) has elsewhere shown, places where occupation is continuous, or return anticipated, tend to be highly structured spatially, and refuse is accordingly patterned – we can also expect material remains to be spatially differentiated across a site.

16. While there is only a modest amount of information relating to the villages inland that serviced the gardens or acted as refuges, this may be because Torres Strait Islanders imposed constraints upon knowledge of these areas. McNiven (2001) argued that Torres Strait Islanders set parameters around trade negotiations and social interactions with Europeans by defining a shoreline frontier. Access to inland villages and gardens may have thus been regulated by Torres Strait Islander hosts during early encounters with Europeans.

THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD. In addition to these characteristics, the early missionary period village may also exhibit the following:

1. The incorporation of the Pacific Islander house form, being distinguishable archaeologically from 'pre-contact' structures by the spatial distribution of sub-surface features, namely post-holes (see Figs 7, 8). Some regional and individual variations on this theme may be apparent.
2. Houses generally faced the sea and often had a road running parallel behind the village.
3. The 'pre-contact' Torres Strait house forms and building techniques overlapped with the general Pacific island house form during the early contact period. Mullins (1995) argues that the Pacific island house form was quickly embraced in the Western Islands, and that the Eastern Islands – notably the 'beehive' house – probably continued to be built up until the turn of the 20th century (Mullins, 1995: 173-74).
4. The ethnographic literature suggests that the spatial configuration of residential structures within villages in Torres Strait remained more or less constant from pre-missionary times into the early missionary period; the church appears to have become a focus for the layout of villages only towards the beginning of the 20th century.
5. The ethnography of the early missionary period suggests that there was an increasing trend to assemble in one or two centralised villages following missionisation.
6. With the acceptance of Pacific Islander teachers of the London Missionary Society, churches/school houses became part of the village structure. The earliest church buildings were built in the Torres Strait or Pacific styles, but later permanent church buildings used coral matrix cement blocks (see Wetherell, 1993: 17; Danaher 1993).
7. Some islands had permanent on-shore processing stations and residential structures to accommodate Torres Strait Islander divers working in the labor-intensive *bêche-de-mer* and pearling fisheries. This may have resulted in a changing village demographic, and evidence of gendered activities may thus be reflected in the archaeology.
8. While there is evidence of a general decline in garden cultivation as access to European stores

increased, the early contact period may exhibit evidence of garden maintenance and associated temporary shelters or villages.

9. Coastal village locations continued to be used throughout history, often on existing village locations or previously extant village sites.
10. The construction of roads, jetties and boathouses began immediately upon the arrival of Pacific islanders to Torres Strait. Murray (1874: 33) wrote that on Mabuyag,

During the short time they have been together – about three months, they much have worked hard. With very little assistance from the natives they have built a good boat house, and a dwelling house, nearly forty feet long, is far [advanced].

11. Pacific islanders introduced new floral species; these should have archaeological signatures through their pollen and phytoliths.
12. The early missionary (and other European/Pacific islander contact) village will also clearly be associated with varied items of European material culture.

With these characteristics in mind, each of which has the potential to leave archaeological traces, we are now in a position to begin the task of tracking back in time the history, and to further explore the nature, of Torres Strait Islander villages.

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